THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • FRIDAY • MARCH 13, 2026 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 44 • LATE CITY EDITION

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GOOGLE OVERHAULS MAPS APP, INTRODUCES MORE AI FEATURES

Google Maps will depend more on AI to help people figure out the best way to get somewhere as part of a major redesign unveiled on Thursday

OVERHAUL DESIGNED BY HOMEGROWN AI

The overhaul driven by Google's Gemini technology will introduce two AI features into the digital mapping service. Gemini's recommendations will draw upon a database spanning more than 300 million places and reviews from more than 500 million contributors that have been accumulated since Google Maps' debut more than 20 years ago

ASK MAPS AND IMMERSIVE NAVIGATION

- One tool called Ask Maps will expand upon conversational abilities that Google brought to the service last November
- Gemini has also created a new tool dubbed Immersive Navigation that will present a three-dimensional perspective designed to give users a better grasp of where they are at any moment in time

2 billion

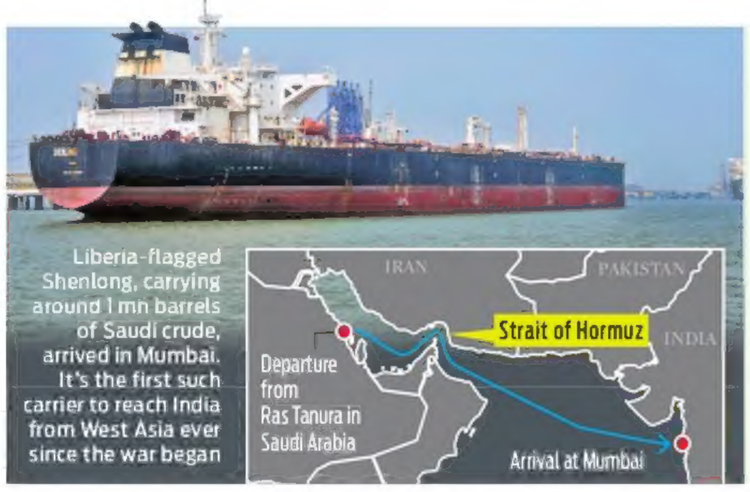
PEOPLE USE GOOGLE'S MAP APPLICATION GLOBALLY

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

MODI SPEAKS TO IRAN PREZ

DISCUSSES SAFETY OF INDIANS, UNINTERRUPTED TRANSIT OF ENERGY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, expressing deep concern over rising hostilities and the growing civilian toll. He stressed the safety and security of Indian nationals in the region as well as importance of uninterrupted transit of goods and energy supplies. "Had a conversation with Iranian President, Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian, to discuss the serious situation in the region. Expressed deep concern over the escalation of tensions and the loss of civilian lives as well as damage to civilian infrastructure." This was their first conversation since the conflict began.



Liberia-flagged Shenlong, carrying around 1 mn barrels of Saudi crude, arrived in Mumbai. It's the first such carrier to reach India from West Asia ever since the war began

TWO OIL SHIPMENTS ARRIVE

WAR WATCH

Apart from Shenlong docked in Mumbai, an Indian-flagged very large crude carrier with around 2 million barrels of Iraqi crude arrived in Indian waters. It is headed to Paradip in Odisha

Reports suggest two other oil tankers headed for India switched off the tracking system, crossed the Strait between March 5 and 10

Indian killed in attack by Iran against US-owned oil tanker SafeSea Vishnu in Iraqi waters

28 Indian-flagged vessels on the east and 24 on the west of the Strait. Have 778 Indian sailors aboard

3 more cargo ships bombed in the Gulf. In all, Iran has attacked at least 16 ships in the Strait so far

Some ships faking themselves as Chinese to avoid Iranian attacks

India co-sponsors UNSC resolution condemning 'egregious' attacks by Iran against Gulf nations

INDIA TO WAIT & WATCH

US mounts heat on big mfg economies; exporters wary

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

WITH the Trump administration invoking Section 301 of the Trade Act against major economies, including India, the government will take a wait and watch stance till the US prepares the final report, said an official source in the know.

Through 301, the US is trying to offset revenue loss after its Supreme Court struck down Trump's global tariffs. In India, the probe triggered uncertainty among exporters in manufacturing sectors like steel, electrical goods, textile etc.

The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) initiated a probe into manufacturing practices in several economies, including India, under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, citing concerns over structural excess capacity. The investigation will assess whether such policies distort markets or restrict US commerce by driving overproduction, trade surpluses and underutilised industrial capacity across key sectors.

"India is adopting a wait-and-watch stance on the Section 301 investigation by the USTR. New Delhi will evaluate the report once released before deciding on any next steps," said the government official.

A Section 301 trade probe allows the office of USTR to examine and potentially punish (by imposing higher tariffs) foreign trade practices deemed unfair, discriminatory, or restrictive to US commerce.

"Evidence suggests the solar module sector is plagued by excess capacity, including that India's current module manufacturing is nearly triple the annual domestic demand. India also has created significant excess capacity in petrochemicals, steel, and other industries," stated USTR.

Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) sought government intervention to safeguard the interests of the textiles and apparel sector, as the USTR announcement brings more uncertainty.

According to steel exporters, with many duties like anti-dumping duty already in place, the sector is grappling with multiple challenges.

Section 301 probe

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LPG rationing starts, kerosene back in mix

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

AFTER denying LPG shortage over the past few days, the government on Thursday acknowledged the pressure on supplies and introduced demand-management measures for both domestic and commercial consumers.

The waiting period for booking a refill has been raised to 45 days in rural and remote areas and to 25 days in urban areas. Earlier, the minimum booking interval across the country was 21 days.

In another key decision, the government said OMCs would allocate 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement starting Thursday. The government had earlier directed oil companies to prioritise supplies to domestic LPG consumers, prompting protests from restaurants and other businesses.

Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said commercial LPG is being regulated to prevent hoarding and black marketing. On natural gas availability, Puri said large LNG cargoes are arriving daily through alternative supply routes, adding that India has sufficient arrangements to maintain supply even if the conflict continues for a prolonged period.

The government has also activated alternative fuel options to ease pressure on LPG and natural gas supplies. Kerosene is being made available through retail outlets and the public distribution system, while fuel oil is being supplied to industrial and commercial consumers.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has advised State Pollution Control Boards to permit the temporary use of such fuels during the crisis period. P14

1ST STATEMENT BY NEW SUPREME LEADER

CLOSE ALL U.S. BASES IN WEST ASIA OR FACE ATTACKS: MOJTABA

We will extract compensation from the enemy, and if they refuse, we will seize as much of their assets as we deem appropriate, and if that is not possible, we will destroy an equivalent amount of their assets

Mojtaba Khamenei, Iran's newly appointed supreme leader, in his first statement released through state TV

AGENCIES @ Dubai

IRAN's new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday issued his first statement since succeeding his father Ali Khamenei, vowing to avenge the deaths of Iranian leaders and civilians, including the 165 killed in the airstrike on a school, and threatening to step up Tehran's attacks against US assets in the region.

In his hardline message, he asked Iran's neighbours to close US bases in their territory telling them that the promise of US protection is a myth. He also announced that the Strait of Hormuz would remain closed and ships that try to pass without permission would be destroyed.

Mojtaba's statement, released through the state TV, declared that revenge against US and Israel is his priority. "A limited amount of this revenge has so far taken concrete form, but until it is fully achieved, this will remain among our priorities," it said. Notably, he did not appear on TV or release a video or audio message. The text of the written statement was read out by a newsreader.

According to reports, Mojtaba, 56, was injured in the joint US-Israel strike on February 28 which killed his father Ali Khamenei. So far, more than 1,200 people were reportedly killed in the war.

470 villages in K'taka lack mobile connectivity

VINCENT D'SOUZA @ Mangaluru

WITH 470 villages lacking mobile connectivity, Karnataka has found its place among states with a significant number of telecom "black spots", revealed data shared by the Department of Telecommunications in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

As of January 31, 2026, India has 8,985 villages that do not have mobile networks. Karnataka, which tops South India in terms of such villages, follows Odisha (1,237), Arunachal Pradesh (1,185), Madhya Pradesh (960) and Maharashtra (872).

Other southern states reported far fewer coverage gaps – Andhra Pradesh with 394 villages, Telangana with 228 and Tamil Nadu with only three. Kerala has no uncovered villages. Within Karnataka, the largest connectivity gaps are concentrated in forested and hilly regions. Uttara Kannada accounts for the highest number with 189 uncovered villages, followed by Shivamogga (75), Chikkamagaluru (40), Chamarajanagar (25), Belagavi (19) and Kalaburagi(18).

The Centre said it is implementing the BharatNet project to provide broadband connectivity in villages, alongside a 4G saturation initiative under which 23,994 mobile towers have been commissioned across the country so far, sources said.

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—Telecom dept

Bridge crash forces students to walk 10km to reach towns

RAGHOTTAM KOPPAR @ Gadag

AT a time when the government is focusing on implementing AI and other advanced technologies in various departments, students of Kurlageri and its surrounding villages in Nargund taluk of Gadag district are struggling to reach their schools and colleges due to a lack of bus service. The public transport came to a halt after the Bennehalla bridge on the Arabhavi-Challakere state highway collapsed last monsoon, and repair work is yet to begin.

Students appearing for their PU exams have been walking 10km every day to reach schools and colleges in Nargund, Navalgund and other towns for the past eight months. Hundreds of students from these villages, who will be appearing for SSLC exams beginning next week, are among these helpless victims.

Daily wage labourers hailing from the villages too are forced to walk 10km or travel about 25km on private transport to reach these towns.

The villagers said their complaints to local authorities fell on deaf ears. Last week, police officials saw students walking and helped them reach their examination centres on time. P7

The collapsed Bennehalla bridge on Challakere-Arabhavi state highway

FIRST DAY, FIRST SHOW

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets newly appointed Governor R N Ravi during his swearing-in ceremony at Lok Bhavan in Kolkata on Thursday | PTI

State's AI panel to ensure ethics, data security

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN order to facilitate ethicality and transparency in the usage and application of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Karnataka government constituted a Committee on Responsible Artificial Intelligence on Thursday. It will develop a Responsible AI policy and implementation roadmap for Karnataka, and is scheduled to submit an interim report in 60 days, and a final set of recommendations in 90 days.

"The committee brings together leading experts from industry, academia and policy to help shape a governance framework that promotes innovation while safeguarding transparency, accountability and citizen trust. This initiative will help Karnataka continue to lead in building an AI ecosystem that is both cutting-edge and responsible," said IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge. P6

EXPRESS READ

New income cap of Rs 3L for ration cards likely

Bengaluru: Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Thursday said the government may increase the income limit for Priority Household Cards (ration cards) from Rs 1.2 lakh to Rs 3 lakh | P4

Cabinet passes Bill to punish honour killings

Bengaluru: The state Cabinet on Thursday approved a Bill that assures freedom of choice in marriage and prevention and prohibition of caste-based crimes and brings honour to inter-caste marriages | P4

WITH THIS ISSUE CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE 44 PAGES, INCLUDING 24 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

SUNRISERS IN FOCUS

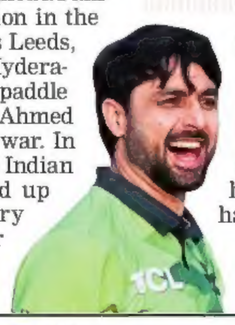
IPL-linked team signs Pak's Abrar in Hundred

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

JUST after noon on Thursday at Piccadilly Lights in London, there was a landmark moment in the world of franchise cricket. An Indian Premier League (IPL) linked team signed a Pakistan player at auction in the Hundred. Sunrisers Leeds, who also own the Hyderabad side, raised the paddle for Pakistan's Abrar Ahmed to spark a bidding war. In the end, Sun TV, the Indian media giant, ended up buying the mystery spinner for over $250,000. It's the first time a side with direct links to the IPL has bought a Pakistan player in the league's history. Three other sides in the Hundred have investors who have stakes in the IPL.

It's significant because a few weeks ago, a report did the rounds saying IPL-linked teams were planning on not signing any Pakistan players. It prompted the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to remind all the teams of consequences if there was discrimination based on nationality. Last year, there were no men's players in any of the Hundred teams, exactly at a time when the ECB opened it up to Indian investment. It's also important to keep in mind that no teams in the SA20 — all six teams are owned by investors who also have significant IPL stakes — have purchased a Pakistan cricketer in three years. Sun TV, interestingly, also own a team there (Eastern Cape). But Pakistan players have previously featured in IPL's sister teams.

Sun TV's acquisition of Ahmed, who has a steller record in international cricket, has invited some vitriol on social media, with several Indian fans upset with it.



Mystery spinner Tariq bought by non-IPL franchise

Apart from Ahmed, the only other Pakistan cricketer to have been bought in auction was Usman Tariq. Birmingham Phoenix, who has American ownership, signed him for £140,000. There were 13 Pak players in the men's auction after pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi withdrew. None of them attracted bids when they were made available for sale, though they could re-enter the auction again.

4 new spl def entities in Vision 2047

JAVARIA RANA @ New Delhi

THE Centre plans to create specialised new entities for data, drones and cognitive warfare while expanding missile defence capabilities to protect critical national assets, according to a long-term roadmap for the armed forces published on Thursday.

The roadmap titled 'Defence Forces Vision 2047', was uploaded on the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff website, laying out a blueprint for the organisational and technological evolution of the military over the next two decades.

It proposes the creation of four new tri-service entities — a Defence Geo-Spatial Agency, Data Force, Drone Force and Cognitive Warfare Action Force — which reflect the growing centrality of data, unmanned systems and perception warfare in contemporary conflicts.

These formations are intended to support the armed forces' shift towards data-centric and multi-domain warfare, where emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous systems and advanced analytics are expected to increasingly shape battlefield outcomes. The plan also divides the military's transformation into three phases leading up to the centenary of India's independence in 2047.

The first phase till 2030 will focus on transition, including organisational restructuring, strengthening deterrence, building indigenous capabilities, enhancing border control, improving maritime and air domain awareness and integrating emerging tech into combat operations. The 2030-40 phase will focus on consolidation. From 2040 to 2047, a world-class military capable of operating seamlessly across land, air, maritime, cyber, space and cognitive domains will be developed.

Operationalisation of Sudarshan Chakra

The operationalisation of Project Sudarshan Chakra, a layered air and ballistic missile defence architecture to shield critical infra and civilian centres from aerial threats, will be done in the 2030-40 phase